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Does Breakfast Club Attendance Affect the Behaviour of Primary School Children?

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Background

- Past research suggests that attending a school breakfast club leads to improvements in children's cognition, academic performance, nutrition, & behaviour (for a review, see Murphy, 2007); and more recently the quality of children's friendships (Defeyter et al. 2009).
- Whilst anecdotal evidence suggests that breakfast club attendance 'prepares' children for the school day, no studies have investigated whether behaviour changes across a breakfast club session.

Observational Study

Method:

Participants:

16 children aged between 7 and 11 years (mean = 8.5 years; range = 6.8 - 10.2), 6 males, 10 females were observed across 15 breakfast club sessions.

Measures:

6 aspects of behaviour were observed, including: classroom noise, excitability, sociability, the number of positive incidents and negative incidents of behaviour and the number of children sitting eating with friends.



Results

Data for each behaviour were collapsed across 3 observations at the beginning and end for each session. The total scores at the beginning of the breakfast club sessions were compared to those at the end. Only significant results are reported.

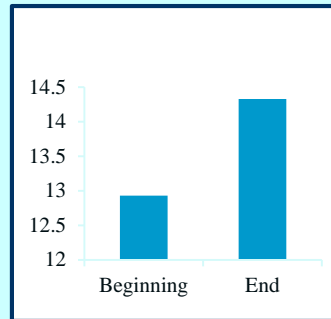


Figure 1: Total Mean Scores for Positive Behaviour

There was a significant difference in sociability at the beginning and end of the sessions ($t(14) = 6.059, p = 0.001$).

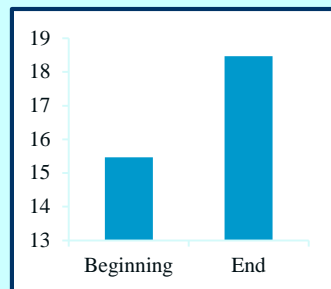


Figure 3: Total Mean Scores for Children Sitting with friends

There was a significant difference between the total number of positive incidents at the beginning and at the end of the breakfast club sessions ($t(14) = 4.010, p = 0.001$), with significantly more incidents of positive behaviour at the end than at the beginning.

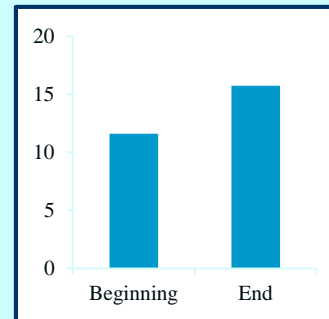


Figure 2: Total Mean Scores for Sociability

There was also a significant difference between the total number of children sitting eating with their friends at the beginning and the end of the breakfast club sessions ($t(14) = 3.315, p = 0.005$).

Summary and Conclusions

The results suggest that children's behaviour changes across the breakfast club session with significantly more displays of positive behaviour and social interaction between children at the end of the breakfast club session than at the beginning.

Hence, this preliminary study lends support to the anecdotal evidence from teachers suggesting that breakfast clubs may help children with the daily transition from home to school.



References

- Defeyter, M.A. (November, 2008). Benefits of breakfast clubs: Cognitive and Social Outcomes. Paper presented at the 9th National Nutrition and Health conference, Olympia conference centre, London, UK.
- Murphy, J. M. (2007). Breakfast and Learning: An Updated Review. *Current Nutrition and Food Science*, 3, 3-36.